



The THISTLE

A MAGAZINE OF SCOTTISH COUNTRY DANCING AND ALLIED SUBJECTS.

Issued by the West Point Grey Scottish Country Dance Club of B.C.
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EDITORIAL

We begin our second year of publication, always an interesting time in the life of a magazine. It is now that we find out how many of our first year subscribers like the magazine enough to continue with it, an important test of a magazine's success. We have also a complete year to look back on, and can see some things which hearten us, and some which do not. We are pleased with the articles and verses which have been contributed, but would have liked more correspondence. We are pleased with the compliments we have had, both on our contents and our typography; but we have had no constructive criticism, and we cannot believe that everything is perfect. We are very pleased with the number of subscribers we have in Scotland, England and New Zealand, nearly as well pleased with the number in the U.S.A. and Canada; and quite frankly disappointed with the number in Vancouver, for whom two sections of the magazine (Local News and Coming Events) are especially designed.

The Editorial Committee is the same as last year: Sybil and Douglas Duncan, Andrew Shawyer, Murray Shoobraid, and Hugh and Nina Thurston.

OUR DANCES, NO. 7

Monymusk.

This is an interesting dance for more reasons than one. The earliest description (A, below) occurs in Werner's Country Dances for 1785. The description occurs again, word for word the same, in Longman and Broderip, 1792. Such plagiarism was not uncommon in the eighteenth century. What was unusual was to find a dance described twice with slight variations in wording as though two different people had described it, or with actual differences in the dance, as though it had become modified in the course of time. Both these things happened to Monymusk, as description B, taken from Preston 1786, and C, taken from Thomas Wilson's Treasures of Terpsichore, 1809, make clear. Finally, it is rare for such an old dance to survive traditionally: few of the dances collected alive are to be found in books published before about 1825. However, Monymusk survived in America, and descriptions can be found in a number of recent American books. Description D is from E. Howe's Musician's Omnibus No. 1.

Monymusk is one of the few names to be mentioned outside text-books of dancing: it is cited in Thomas Moore's poem "Country Dance and Quadrille," 1852. And, of course, Monymusk has a particular interest for us because it appears in the Scottish Country Dance Books.

Here are the descriptions:

A. (Werner, 1785)

Turn your partner with the right hand quite round and cast off one couple, turn with your left hand quite round. Set three and three top and bottom and turn your partner; set three and three sideways and turn your partner. Hands six quite round and back. Lead out-sides and turn your partner with both hands.

B. (Preston, 1786)

Turn your partner with the right hand and cast off one couple — turn your partner with the left hand and cast back the lady falling in at the top, the gentleman at the bottom — set three and three and turn your partner — set three and three sideways and turn your partner — hands six round — and back again — lead through the bottom and come up one couple — lead through the top. (Each phrase is four bars.)

C. (Wilson, 1809)

The top couple swing with the right hand round one couple, then with the left — set three across and three in your places — hands six round and back again — and lead through the bottom and top. (Each phrase is eight bars.)

Our Dances (cont'd.)

D. (Howe, modern American)

The first couple join right hands and swing round one and a half times. Go below the second couple (the first lady goes below the second gentleman on the outside, the first gentleman at the same time goes below and between the second and third ladies), forward and back six, the first couple swing three-quarters round. The first gentleman goes between the second couple (on the inside) and the first lady between the third couple, forward and back six. The first couple swing three-quarters round to places (below one couple). Right and left four.

Wilson's description can be interpreted by looking up the various figures in his Complete System. The American version is still traditional in New England.

It is very instructive to compare the versions. A and B are nearly, if not quite, the same, for "lead outsides" at this date almost certainly meant the same as the last eight bars of B (i.e. lead down one, cast up one, lead up one, cast off one): and, in fact, this is just what Wilson's "lead through the bottom and top" means.

In the S.C.D.B. version this figure, which amounts to "figures of eight at the sides," has been replaced by "reels of three at the sides." A greater difference between the S.C.D.B. version and the old ones is that originally the dancing couple turned each other from lines of three across the dance to lines at the sides (as in Hamilton House) instead of turning single as in Book II: versions A and B are quite clear on this point, and it has survived in the American version.

The tune was originally named "Sir Archibald Grant of Monemus's reel," and published in thirty-seven reels and strathspeys composed by Daniel Dow, 1775. In most collections it is simply called "Monymusk", and is usually (though not always) in strathspey rhythm. The dance is not called a strathspey in any of the books quoted, however, and the surviving (American) version is not danced in that rhythm. The S.C.D. Book reconstruction (which quotes Preston as its source) uses a version of the tune taken from Joshua Campbell's Collection, 1788, and accordingly we execute the dance with strathspey steps today. Besides being used for its eponymous dance, "Monymusk" is a great favourite — and deservedly so — for the strathspey part of the Scotch Reel.

LOCAL NEWS

Our heartiest congratulations and good wishes go to Miss Nina Grudnoff and Dr. Hugh Thurston on the occasion of their marriage on May 5th, 1962, in St. Paul's Anglican Church in Vancouver. The combination of a lovely Spring day, a radiant bride and a groom in full Highland dress made a charming picture. After the ceremony, a delightful reception was held at the Faculty Club, University of British Columbia, where a programme of Scottish Country Dancing was thoroughly enjoyed.

Dr. and Mrs. Thurston honeymooned on the Continent, attending a folk dance festival in Yugoslavia, with a group from Pittsburgh.

Another successful Scottish Country Dance Camp was held on the week end of May the 18th. Registration was close to a 100, a good percentage from out of town and the United States.

All the classes were very well attended, instruction was excellent, and the quality of the dancing far superior to the previous camps.

A MUCH BELATED STORY PROMPTED BY PAUL RISING.

Story by Sheila Sainsbury.

An eightsome reel was the reason for the "Dominion's" delayed departure from Kamloops, March 1961. Some 12 to 15 members of St. Andrews Scottish Country Dance Club were seeing off, (to the accompaniment of Scottish tunes on the accordion by Murray Black,) one of their group on the first stage of her return home to South Africa.

Ann was already on board when some one called "how about a last eightsome?" Window blinds snapped up and train passengers and crew gazed in amazement out into the darkness. And Ann skipped off the train to join the Eightsome.

Bystanders were heard to ask "what kind of dancing is this?" or "which square dance club do they belong to?"

The dance wasn't half-way through, when the whistle blew, and Ann made as if to break from the set, again to board the train. Guard and conductor held a hurried conference then announced "Carry on — never mind the train being late, we want to see the end of this". And late the train was!! Ann finished her parting dance set. It was a fitting "Farewell".

HISTORICAL NOTES

(Dr. T. M. Flett of the University of Liverpool and his wife are two of the very few people who are active in field research in Scottish dancing, and are probably alone in having done substantial work in both field and documentary research. When we asked them for a contribution to the Thistle they suggested that we might re-print their article "Some early Highland dancing competitions" in the Aberdeen University Review (vol. 4, No. 115, p. 345). The complete article is too long for the Thistle, so we give the gist of it here, and refer interested readers to the original for fuller details.)

The modern form of Highland games is not, as is so often supposed, a product of Queen Victoria's delight in everything Highland, but goes back at least to 1781, when a piping competition was arranged at Falkirk under the auspices of the Glasgow branch of the Highland Society of London. Similar competitions were held in Falkirk in 1782 and 1783, but in the latter year many of the competitors were so dissatisfied with the judging that they proceeded to Edinburgh to find other patronage, and there arranged a further competition later in the same year, which led to the formation in 1784 of the Highland Society of Edinburgh, who organized the subsequent competitions. These were held in one of the Edinburgh theatres, and took place annually from 1784 until 1826, and then every three years until at least 1844.

Dancing was first introduced at these competitions in 1783 as an interlude (a dance after every dozen or so pipe pieces,) and was executed by the pipers. Eye-witnesses write of the "lively and spirited" and "spirit in Highland dancing", and of a "lively and animated dance" to "suitable airs, which possessed expression and character".

Dancers who were not pipers first appeared in 1787, and in 1795 prizes were awarded for dancing by the Highland Society of Edinburgh. The pipers' prizes were awarded by the Highland Society of London, and were distributed at the close of the competition by a Highland chief, or other person of "rank, talents, (or) acknowledged patriotism", but the dancers had to collect theirs later.

The first dances actually named are Highland Reels, first mentioned in 1788. These seem to have been the only dances performed during the first few years of the competitions, and were presumably either Threesome or Foursome Reels. In 1799, Madam Frederick of the Theatre Royal, "dressed in an appropriate garb, danced Strathspeys, Jiggs, and other dances". Strathspeys were mentioned again in 1802 as being danced in the competitions, and here they would be perhaps Highland Reels danced to Strathspey tunes, or perhaps the Twosome Strathspey. This Twosome Strathspey, which was probably a descendent of the 18th century Strathspey minuet, was performed regularly from 1818 to 1835, but was never very popular, and seems to have died out soon after 1838.

Another dance mentioned in the accounts of the competitions is (1806) Mac an Fhairsair, one of the "slow Highland dances, emblematical of war or courtship", which was danced by one or two persons in Dunkeld, and which was presumably the same as the Makinorsair (Fhairsair is silent in Gaelic) described by Stewart of Garth as a dance in which a naked broadsword was flourished. Other dances performed at the competitions were the Reel of Tulloch, first danced in 1829; Gille Callum, first danced in 1832 and subsequently the most popular competition dance; the Highland Fling, danced in 1841; a dirk dance resembling the Hebridean "Cailleach an Dudain", performed in 1841; and various un-named solos.

Except in 1844, when four juveniles competed, the dancers in the competitions were all men, varying in number from 18 to 44 in any one year. Not everything went smoothly. There was a complaint about the lighting; only the "dark side" of the dancers was visible, making their legs resemble "those of the black-legged highland sheep" and this, together with the "clattering noise", detracted from "the true effect of that highly energetic dance". Also "the exposed limbs of the dancers are sometimes exhibited to view in a manner altogether superfluous, and highly offensive to every lady of correct taste and feeling".

The few adjudication sheets which have been preserved, tell us nothing of the style of the period. Terse remarks like "just tolerable", "very good", or "indifferent" are common but there are only three comments on technique: in 1829 one of the pipers was "indiff't. - raises knee too high", and another competitor "takes too big a reel"; and in 1832 one of the prize-winners "dances too high".

(Readers interested in the development of Scottish dancing would do well to note the dates in this article; popular ideas on this topic are sometimes wildly astray. Ed.)

NORTHERN JUNKET

The square-dance magazine that is different. \$2.50 for 12 issues, from Ralph Page, 182 Pearl St., Keene, N.H., U.S.A.

Each issue brings you interesting articles on all phases of dancing: squares, contras, folk-dance, folk-song, folk-lore. Traditional recipes, too, for hungry dancers.

NEWS FROM SCOTLAND

We noticed the following paragraph in a recent "Oban Times", reporting Oban's annual gala day — "Highlight of a thoroughly enjoyable afternoon was the exhibition by Farlane MacKenzie, Cuilfail Hotel, who played "Over the Sea to Skye" on the bagpipes while skiing behind a speedboat".

THE ERISKAY LOVE-LILT

At the Lewis Mod, held in Stornoway last June, Murdo Angus MacRae, a pupil at the Nicolson Institute, won first place in the "singer's own choice" competition with a song entitled "Mi tha bronach 'gad chaoidh". This song is very like the well-known Eriskay Love-lilt in the Kennedy-Fraser collection, whose chorus is "Mi tha bronach tum dhi". According to Annie MacKenzie, described by The Weekly Scotsman as "one of the island's most knowledgeable song collectors", the Lewis song is the original. The words were written by a bard in the village of Shader. It was sung by girls who worked as gutters with the herring fleets. Fellow-workers on Eriskay picked it up, and there Marjorie Kennedy-Fraser heard it.

HAMILTON HOUSE

B.D.F. (Reprinted from the Crier, by permission)

To the tune of the dance of that name.

First woman: Hey, brother, and how do you do?
I tum the other, so snubs to you.

First man: I do the same to the opposite two
While she makes her way to the top.

Both: Now two little threes set forth;
The girl looks south and the man looks north.
Turn your partner for all you are worth;
When you reach the wrong side you must stop.
Threes balance again with zest;
The girl looks east and the man looks west.
Twiddle-de-diddle and please do your best
To be careful of squashing my feet.
Now, all of us, six hands round.
(The book says six, but it's twelve I've found)
Back to the right with a hop and a bound
And we're ready, with luck, to repeat.*

*This last line is inappropriate when you reach the bottom. "Do you suffer at all from the heat?" might perhaps then be substituted.

HINTS ON BETTER DANCING

If you have any idea which may help towards better dancing — whether the technique of the dance itself, planning a programme, running a dance group, or anything else — and if you would like others to share it, send it in. We shall publish the most useful hint (or hints, if brief enough) in each issue. To start with, here is a hint on forming longwise sets.

Everyone knows that sets form from the top: each couple, as they reach the dance-floor, take their place below whoever is there already. This is merely a question of manners. Even so, it sometimes takes a while to get the set in a position ready to dance. The top couple is responsible for choosing the correct width of set (in a class the teacher may, of course, adjust the width; at a dance the M.C. may do so.) The second couple choose the correct spacing between couples (which will dictate the length of set). The remaining couples are supposed to carry this spacing on down the set. The correct width is easy enough. The difficulty is to keep the spacing between couples even, and this is where our hint comes in. If you are, say, third man, don't try to watch the gap between first and second men, which you can do only by leaning your head forward out of line: watch the gap between the first and second **women**. If your partner is keeping accurately opposite you, then when the three women are evenly spaced, you are in the right position.